

BLINDFOLDED

A Mystery Story of San Francisco

BY
EARLE ASHLEY WALCOTT

CHAPTER XXIX. The Heart of the Mystery.

I was in the shadow of the mystery. A hundred questions rose to my lips; but behind them all frowned the grim wolf-visage of Doddridge Knapp, and I could not find the courage that could make me speak to them.

Mrs. Knapp, I said, "you have called me by my name. I had almost forgotten that I had ever borne it. I have lived more in the last month than in the 25 years that I remember before it, and I have almost come to think that the old name belongs to some one else. May I ask how you got hold of it?"

"It was simple enough. Henry had told me about you. I remembered that you were coming from the same town he had come from. I telegraphed to an agent in Boston. He went up to your place, made his inquiries and telegraphed me. I suppose you will be pleased to know," she continued with a droll affection of malice in her voice, "that he mailed me your full history as gathered from the town pump. It is at the house now."

"I tried to get something out of Mother Borton concerning you," continued Mrs. Knapp. "I even went so far as to see her once."

"I don't think you got any more out of her than she wanted to tell."

"Indeed I did not. I was afraid Mr. Richmond had not gone about it the right way. You know Mr. Richmond acted as my agent with her?"

"No, I didn't know. She was as close-mouthed with me as with you, I think."

"Well, I saw her. I wanted to get what information she had of you and of Henry."

"She had a good deal of it, if she wanted to give it up."

"So I suppose. But she was too clever for me. She spoke well of you, but not a word could I get from her about Henry. Yet she gave me the idea that she knew much."

"I should think she might. I had told her the whole story."

"She is used to keeping secrets, I suppose," replied Mrs. Knapp. "But I must reward her well for what she has done."

"She is beyond fear or reward."

"Dead?" cried Mrs. Knapp in a shocked voice. "And how?"

"She died, I fear, because she befriended me." And then I told her the story of Mother Borton's end.

"Poor creature!" said Mrs. Knapp sadly. "Yet perhaps it is better so. She has died in doing a good act."

The carriage had been rolling along swiftly. Despite the rain the streets were smooth and hard, and we made rapid progress. We had crossed a bridge, and with many turns made a course toward the southeast. Now the ground became softer, and progress was slow. An interminable array of trees lined the way on both sides, and to my impatient imagination stretched for miles before us. Then the road became better, the horses trotted briskly forward again, their hoofs patterning dully on the softened ground.

"All the better," I thought. "It's as good as a muffler if any one is listening for us."

"Here's the place," came the voice of Dicky, giving direction to the driver; and the carriage slackened pace and stopped. Looking out I saw that we were at a division of the road where a two-story house faced both of the branching ways.

"You'd better come out," said Dicky at the door, addressing his remark to me. "He was to meet us here."

"Be careful," cautioned Mrs. Knapp. I kept my hand on the revolver that lay in my overcoat pocket, and walked with Dicky on to the porch. It was a common roadside saloon, and at this hour it appeared wholly deserted. Even the dog, without which I knew no roadside saloon could exist, was as silent as its owners.

"Here's a go!" said Dicky. "He was to meet us, sure. What time have you got?"

I struck a match in a corner and looked at my watch by its flare.

"Five minutes to three."

"Whew!" he whispered, "we're regularly done. I thought he had a bad eye when I was bargaining with him."

I wondered if Dicky had a hand in the trick, if trick it should prove to be.

"Well," said Dicky dubiously, "I think I know where the fellow would have taken us. I trailed him this afternoon, and I'll lay two to one that I can pick out the right road."

"Is this the third road from Brook-

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lyn?" I asked, pointing to the track that led to the left.

"I reckon so," said Dicky. "I haven't kept count, but I recollect only two before it."

"All right. Up with you then!" Dicky obediently mounted to the seat beside the driver.

"I shall ride outside," I said to Mrs. Knapp. "I may be needed."

Half a mile farther we passed a house, and within a quarter of a mile another.

"We are on the right road," was my thought as I compared these in my mind with the crosses on the diagram.

About half a mile farther a small cluster of buildings loomed up, dark and obscure, by the roadside.

"This is the place," I said confidently, motioning the driver to pull up. I remembered that Henry Wilton's map had stopped at the third cross from the parting of the roads.

"No, it isn't," said Dicky eagerly. "It's two or three miles farther on. I trailed the fellow myself to the next house, and that's a good two miles at least."

I had leaped to the ground, and opened the door of the carriage.

"We are at the fourth place," I said.

"And the cockeyed barn?" inquired Mrs. Knapp, peering out.

I was struck silent by this, and looked blankly at the dark forbidding structure that fronted on the road.

"You're right," said Mrs. Knapp with a laugh. "Can't you make out that funny little window at the end there?"

I looked more closely at the building. In the dim light of the stars the coat of whitewash that covered it

made it possible to trace the outline of a window in the gable that fronted the road. Some freak of the builder had turned it a quarter of the way around, giving it a comical suggestion of a man with a droop to his eye.

"And the iron cow?" I asked.

"Stupid! a pump, of course," replied Mrs. Knapp, with another laugh.

"Now see if there is a lane here by the barn."

A narrow roadway just wide enough for a single wagon joined the main road at the corner of the building.

"Then drive up it quietly," was Mrs. Knapp's direction.

Just beyond the barn I made out the figure of the pump in a conspicuous place by the roadside and felt more confident that we were on the right road.

The driver swore in an undertone as the hack lurched and groaned in a boggy series of ruts, and a branch whipped him in the face. I was forced to give a grunt myself, as another slapped my sore arm and sent a sharp twinge of pain shooting from the wound till it tingled in my toes. Dicky, protected between us, chuckled softly.

I reflected savagely that nothing spoils a man for company like a mistaken sense of humor.

Suddenly the horses stopped so short that we were almost pitched out.

Mrs. Knapp rapped on the carriage door and I opened it.

"Have you come to the bars?" she asked presently.

"I guess so. We've come against something like a fence."

"Well, then," she replied, "when we get through, take the road to the left. That will bring us to the house."

"You are certain?"

"That is what Henry wrote in the cipher beneath the map. The house must be only a few hundred yards away."

The bars were there, and I lifted the wet and soggy boards with an anxious heart. Were we, after all, so near the hiding-place? And what were we to find?

On a sudden turn the house loomed up before us and a wild clamor of dogs broke the stillness of the night.

"I hope they are tied," I said, with a poor attempt to conceal my misgivings.

"We'll have a lively time in a quarter of a minute if they aren't," laughed Dicky, as he followed me.

But the baying and barking came no nearer, and I helped Mrs. Knapp out of the carriage. She looked at the house closely.

"This is the place," she said, in an unmistakable tone of decision. "We must be quick. I wish something would quiet those dogs; they will bring the whole country out."

It seemed an hour before we could raise any one, but it may not have been three minutes before a voice came from behind the door.

"Who's there?"

"It is L. M. K.," said Mrs. Knapp; then she added three words of gibberish that I took to be the passwords used to identify the friends of the boy.

At the words there was the sound of bolts shooting back and the heavy door opened enough to admit us. As we passed in, it was closed once more and the bolts shot home.

(To be continued.)

Safeguard for Coal.
The best preventive for spontaneous ignition of coal, says Compressed Air, is a small cylinder containing compressed carbon dioxide, fitted with a fuse plug melting at 200 degrees Fahrenheit. A cylinder one foot long and three inches in diameter is sufficient to take care of eight tons of coal.

The Woman Who Works.
The woman who works is inevitably a woman who is broad in her views. Her opinions are not riveted to any one spot. Her viewpoint is movable. Her experience in the business mart gives her sympathy for other woman workers. She has learned to accept every friend, new and old, at an honest valuation. She learns to enjoy the society of people who have made something out of life.—Exchange.

Turning the New Leaf

With reverent heart we turn anew
An untouched page of time.

'Tis ours to fill with noble deeds
Or stain with sin and crime;

Then ere we mar its surface pure—
Ere we begin anew,

'Tis well that o'er our last year's work
We take a short review.

Alas! we scan through tears the page
We meant should be so fair—

The blotted page where records live
Of hope and toil and care;

The page that ends the finished year
Of loss and gain and strife,

Of love and home's sweet happiness,
And peace that blesses life.

So much there is of pleasantness
Our record has to tell—

And so much done unworthily
We might have done so well!

Though mental retrospection shows
That shine exceeds the shade;

Too late we would erase the blots
Of past mistakes we made.

Then turn the new leaf. Look not back
To grieve o'er loss and pain,

But view the future's spotless page
Where we begin again;

And here resolve, by God's own grace,
That we will do our best

To keep life's record clean and pure
And trust Him for the rest.

—Margaret Scott Hall.

As the Years Mark Time for Mankind

The old-fashioned sun dial, after all, was the true time piece. That little pocket sun dial that we are told counted all the hours "when the sun shone" made the perfect record of human days.

The noisy clocks and remorseless calendars that told off the worst and weariest of time's movements literally spoiled the reckoning. History began to build itself upon

wretchedness of a people, and all creation to take note of time by its loss instead of its golden gain in the hours of perfect sunlight.

But the reaction has set in. It is the glad hours and not the sad ones that are to be made to count.

Let us tarry awhile
At the sign of the smile
Is the watchword which even pious pilgrims are sending out to upset the ancient reckoning. "Let the smile become the Christian's rather than the devil's sign" they cry in chorus, and the joy of the spirit become the measure of its days.

Good Isaac Barrow's picture of the child of heaven "smiling always with a never-ending serenity of countenance and flourishing in an immortal youth" has at last taken hold of the Christian world, and, spurred on by the new thought rhapsodies, promises to turn back the calendar of all our days.

Counting time by heart throbs is no new method, to be sure, but the kind of heart throbs that "always find man young and always keep him so" were rather lost with the sun and nature worship of the early world.

When men went to nature for their reckoning it was as Wordsworth tells us:

They felt
As if the moving time had been
A thing as steadfast as the scene
On which they gazed themselves away.

Centuries young were those children of the morning, before even the sun dial had begun to tell them of the flight of time. It remains true still that whether nature or the soul strikes the joy-note in the human breast, the poet's question rises instinctively to the lips:

O what have I to do with time,
For this the day was made.

Man Has His Choice.
Good or bad, the years come out of the bosom of the infinite bearing some boon from the eternal for man to lay hold of if he will. To choose the permanent from out the mutable and fleeting is the life secret they carry, and how much hangs upon the choice eternity alone can tell.

There are watchmen at the gates who assure us that each year brings gifts peculiar to itself, and one year or one world does not restore the lost offerings of the other. "Long after we have passed away out of men's sight and out of men's memory the world with something that we have left within it, will be going on still," says Phillips Brooks, "and long after the world has passed away we shall go on somewhere, somehow, the same beings still, carrying into the depths of eternity something that the world has done for us that no other world could do."

Alexander Mocked.
New worlds, with each new year, to conquer, mock the cry of Alexander and declare indeed a new kingdom wherein to reign. Closer and closer comes the promise of that awakening hour when man shall in truth become "a living soul," and "with an eye made quiet by the power of harmony, and the deep power of joy," shall "see

into the life of things." How many a rose of morning and ripe fruit of the golden noon shall then return to him the science of life, which permits no lost good, nor wasted atom even, in all creation's bounds, may gloriously declare. "Where are the snows of yesterday?" whispers the tender poet, but the green of spring and the bloom of summer are nature's answer to his yearning cry.

And shall man be less blessed than nature in garnering the treasures of the year? Is that evil genius, that the ancients beheld standing at the door of the new year, forever to give lethe to drink that he may wander blindly into the unknown way, shorn of the best boons and talismans of the past? Ah, the poets who try life and love know better.

Each new year is a leaf of our love's rose:
It falls, but quick another rose leaf grows:
So is the flower from year to year the same.

But riches, for the dead leaves feed the flame.

Thus they read the riddle and the "million-centuried" sweetness that goes with it to-day. Neither is man dragged by any god or genius but the one within him, that he may "tell no tales" and carry no tokens from the departing year. What he tells to cheer or depress his comrades, what he carries to help or hinder both them and himself, is in the power of his own open-eyed choice. Perhaps the best hint that was ever offered to guide him is the brief and pointed one given by the sage, when he writes:

"A man should make life and nature happier to us, or he had better never been born." It is the one pre-eminently in the air at the present moment. It would fill all the newspapers in the land and drive the quotation-abhorring editors mad if one-quarter of the stout maxims of this nature which the times offer should demand place in their columns. Already their humorous writers are trying to demoralize them and send some of the cheerful and cheering-up people over to his Satanic majesty, where no doubt they are needed since the dry season set in.

Life's Logic Quaint.
If there be such a Satanic monarch, probably he loves the cheerful sinner just as heaven must love the cheerful saint. Yet the logic of life is against him. The smile is not legitimately the devil's sign. It is the pessimist who is playing into his hands, treating his sovereignty as if it could overthrow heaven's and all the power of the Eternal Goodness. To act as if they had a faith worth smiling over would seem to be the attitude of men who believed in a sovereign of love and omnipotence rather than one of malice and black arts, and it may be that the Christian world is at last finding it out. Certainly the Gospel evangel "Rejoice, rejoice!" is sounding anew through all the realms of Christendom and becoming a part of culture and philosophy everywhere. Fuller's counsel: "Be happy in the present moment and put not off being so to a time to come, as though that time should be of another make from this," prevails in the intellectual as religious world, and promises to show "life whole" to more than a handful of seers and sages.

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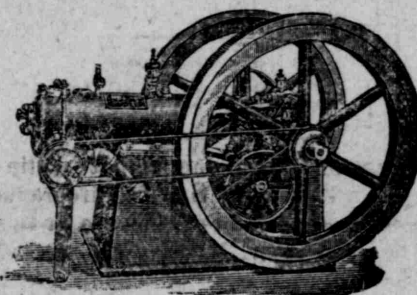
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